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TIDBITS

Tips and Helpful Links

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Students in the early grades spend much of their school day learning to read – the nuts and bolts of "decoding" text. An abundance of probes exist designed to measure discrete sub-skills within the hierarchy of the decoding process, and teachers progress monitor students' acquisition of sight words, the ability to identify, segment, and blend phonemes, and their subsequent ability to develop phoneme/grapheme correspondences. Fluency is the target, but fluency means more than just reading a sentence with proper inflection without pausing.

The point of reading fluently is comprehension – that the student gets to the end of the sentence having drawn meaning from the text. Many students quickly grasp sound-symbol associations while others lag behind, needing targeted instruction for longer periods.

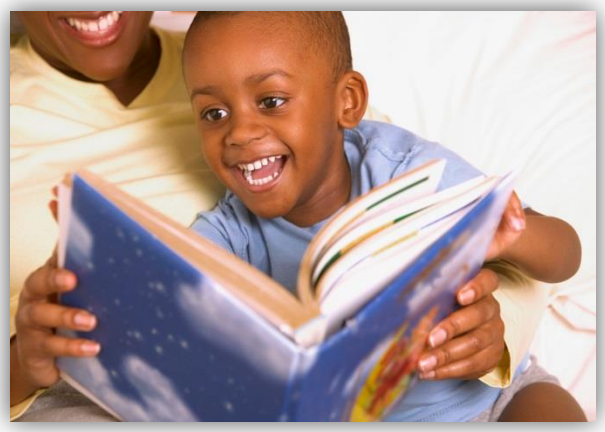
While foundational skills are critical to a successful school experience, the broader perspective of our college and career ready standards reveals an emphasis on meaning -- building background in content areas as a foundation for new learning. For students who quickly master decoding and fluency, moving on to read a variety of texts as their assignments and interests dictate will rapidly build that necessary background. Students with reading decoding challenges will need alternative avenues for building background to keep pace with their grade level peers.

One option for these students, which is articulated in the foundational standards, is teacher read-alouds. This shared reading exposes students to a wealth of knowledge beyond their current reading capabilities. When teachers select quality texts, both informational and literary, to share with students, they help all students acquire vocabulary and knowledge across content areas. Students learn to compare and contrast, analyze, and synthesize during modeling and structured conversations. By removing the burden of decoding for text-challenged students, they are free to focus their energy on words and ideas, and make connections between new material and what was previously learned.

They can draw inferences and think about the implications of what is being said. Shared readings present an opportunity to introduce students to texts worth reading. There are many elements of well-crafted writing to explore. As teachers select texts for read-alouds, it's important to consider qualitative measures. Although you may begin with literary texts that contain a single level of meaning, advancing to literature with multiple levels of meaning, accompanied by teacher supports such as "think-alouds", will help students access more sophisticated material. Likewise, informational texts with more implied or obscure purposes should follow those with explicitly stated purposes. Teachers also need to evaluate the text structure and move from simple toward more complex and unconventional formats. Spend time on deconstructing text features such as graphics containing essential information. As a purpose for digging deeper, take the opportunity to explore figurative language and domain-specific as well as academic vocabulary. Build on students' content knowledge by introducing increasingly more sophisticated texts in a content area or discipline as you examine a theme or subject.

"Children's oral language competence is strongly predictive of their facility in learning to read and write: listening and speaking vocabulary and even mastery of syntax set boundaries as to what children can read and understand no matter how well they can decode"

(Catts, Adolf, & Weismer, 2006; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoover & Gough, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).



With modeling and scaffolding, students can increase their listening comprehension skills through teacher read-alouds. Listening comprehension abilities correlate well with reading comprehension, so as students master decoding and fluency they will be better positioned to engage with complex texts independently and continue to expand their content knowledge.

Thoughtful inclusion of quality texts accompanied by Universally Designed activities and discussion opportunities help prepare students for the more content-rich materials they'll grapple with in later grades. When struggling students encounter new words and ideas beyond their own language skills

and knowledge of the world, they can quickly begin to lose ground and fall behind. They lack the ability to make connections due to limited knowledge. Building domain knowledge enables students to make sense of word combinations, consider possible multiple meanings, infer based on prior knowledge, and understand literary devices such as metaphor, irony, and idioms. Comprehension can't improve without serious attention to building students' word and world knowledge.

Beyond teacher shared reading, students with special needs can continue to build background knowledge accessed through the use of technology. The inclusion of video, text-to-speech, virtual experiences, and opportunities to collaborate and share with students in classrooms across the country and the world enable students to build knowledge through additional portals. Through technology students expand knowledge by exploring topics of personal interest. These alternative access routes can appeal to and benefit all students, but they are particularly important as accessibility features for students who continue to struggle with decoding and fluency. While shared reading presents opportunities to move students into increasingly sophisticated material with supports, the inclusion of technology provides broad access to information in an appealing, engaging, and accessible format. Teachers have the flexibility to tailor lessons to specific needs, such as recording lessons for repeated viewing so the pace of instruction is appropriate. It also provides the option of pre-teaching so that students with special needs are better prepared to participate in discussion and activities.

The integration of technology provides avenues of expression beyond traditional speaking and encoding, and by offering choice increases the likelihood of engagement and enthusiasm for learning.

Before investing in technology it's important to check ratings with tools such as a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template to be sure the product meets accessibility requirements. Website accessibility can be checked using WAVE at Wave.WebAIM.org The impact of technology's role in providing learning alternatives can't be overstated, but careful selection in terms of accounting for diverse needs remains a guiding factor. Check out this webinar for amazing examples of connected learning (it takes some time to download).

NCSC Community of Practice

This year of transition to the new alternate assessment is an opportune time to join ADE's NCSC Community of Practice. Monthly calls offer pertinent topics as well as the chance to ask questions, suggest planning or instructional strategies using the new materials, and share successes and challenges with colleagues and your ADE support staff. Participation in CoPs will give you the first hand information you'll need to integrate Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards into your instruction. Shared information will also give you the expertise necessary to assist fellow teachers in utilizing various NCSC (our new assessment) resources.

Please join us for our first call of the year:

August 11 at 4:00 p.m. or
August 14 at 3:30 p.m.

--Email us for more information—
AssessingSWDs@azed.gov

--Announcing Our New Webpage—

Be sure to visit the newly designed Alternate Assessment webpage at

http://www.azed.gov/special-education/aimsa/

featuring information tabs that provide easy access to all the resources for both alternate assessments and information you'll need throughout the year.

Let us know how you like it as well as any ideas that will help us improve our service to you!

Fall NCSC Pilot 2

A second pilot for the new NCSC Alternate Assessment is planned for the fall. The purpose of this pilot is to evaluate the functionality of the adaptive features in the assessments in preparation for next spring's operational testing. We encourage everyone to consider participation – it will be beneficial to teachers as well as students to preview the test format and become familiar with its various features. ADE will be contacting district alternate assessment test coordinators to participate in Pilot 2 Early August. Then test coordinators will be asked to submit applications for selected students beginning August 18th.

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